



FREE FORESTERS CRICKET CLUB

150 years at the heart of cricket

The Free Foresters first took the field on 20 July 1856 when the Reverend W.K.R. Bedford raised a side of amateurs to play against the Pilgrims of Dee in the grounds of his rectory in Sutton Coldfield. During the game this team adopted the title Free Foresters – 'foresters' as they were from the neighbouring Forest of Arden in Warwickshire and Forest of Needwood in Staffordshire and 'free' because members would be free to play against the club without permission, not the convention for wandering clubs at the time – hence the FF motto 'United Though Untied'.

The club's rise was remarkable. Within five years the FF had defeated the MCC at Lord's, and, admittedly with 16 players, beat the United England XI and the All England XI who were the two leading professional teams of the time. In 1863 the FF bowled out Surrey at the Oval for 34, and two years later defeated another leading county, Nottinghamshire, on level terms.

For many years there was no England side which did not contain at least one Free Forester, and the club was the only wandering side in modern times to play first class cricket – finishing this tradition with a win in two days against Oxford in 1964 (with Sir Frank Worrell in the side)! Eighty-eight Free Foresters have played Test cricket for England, whilst one, Matthew Fleming, played one-day cricket.

Thirty-three Free Foresters have captained England. Illustrious past members include Colin Cowdrey, Douglas Jardine - who captained England in the bodyline series - and Frank Worrell, the first black captain of the West Indies who beat England in devastating fashion in 1963. Since the 1970s, far fewer FF members have played Test cricket, though a good number have appeared in county cricket.

The club remains the leading wandering club in the country after the MCC, with over 60 fixtures a season and a membership of 2,000. Regular matches include Oxford and Cambridge Universities, the Army, Air Force and the Royal Navy, whilst recent fixtures have included Ireland, Amateur England, Dutch U21, the Combined Services and John Paul Getty's XI. The club also plays many leading school and club sides and undertakes regular biennial tours to Holland and Ireland, as well to cricket festivals in Philadelphia and Portugal. In January 2007, the club returned from a three-week tour to Australia.

A history of the Free Foresters has just been written by the recently retired President, Philip Whitcombe, to commemorate the first 150 years. Philip had the distinction of dismissing Bradman at Lords for 5 on his last tour of England in 1948. Though not a Forester himself, Bradman's team-mate, the renowned, quixotic all-rounder Keith Miller was. A copy of the book should be available in your pavilion after the FF game for all those keen students of cricket.

The club remains committed to playing 'friendly' cricket at the highest possible level. We are keen to find new challenging opponents and recruit top young players, especially from the schools it plays. In July 2008, an FF Academy - Patron is Christopher Martin-Jenkins - will be inaugurated to introduce young cricketers to the club and play matches against similar young high grade representative sides.

Meanwhile, a carrot! Should anyone score a century, or takes six wickets against the Free Foresters in a school match, the club will reward the feat with a Free Forester bat made by John Newbury. We are sure that whoever wins a bat will have worked hard and be made of the right stuff for us! For, although the club has a long and proud history, it is the quality of its players and the future that is paramount.

Ireland – one of many longstanding, special cricketing connections



W. D. Bayly, A. Appleby, R. T. Ashill
A. Pilcher, E. M. Lawson-Smith, W. E. W. Collins, J. A. J. Maynard, Capt. Hamilton, S. Crossfield
R. Ryder, Richardson, F. Stowell, A. B. Cunningham
FREE FORESTERS IN IRELAND, 1894.

Free Foresters in August 1894 on the first tour to Ireland. They sailed on the yacht Rona, first to Cork and on to Dublin, here at Phoenix Park



Free Foresters Centenary tour to Ireland in August 1994, at the Rathmines ground in Dublin against Leinster Cricket Union



Eoin Morgan, Ireland No.3 batsman, who won his first Irish cap against the Free Foresters in a one-dayer at Eton, August 2003